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AUTHOR Tannenbaum, Aron G.
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ABSTRACT

Development of political science courses on the college level is discussed in light of bureaucratic and disciplinary constraints. Bureaucratic constraints are interpreted to include clearance from institutional superiors, adequate student enrollment, adequate personnel and research resources, and relevance to undergraduate political science study. Disciplinary constraints mandate that the content of a proposed course meet generally accepted criteria for what constitutes a course in political science. It is hypothesized that bureaucratic constraints are more familiar, more confining, and have less legitimacy in the eyes of most political scientists than disciplinary constraints. Data used to test these hypotheses are based on personal experience developing a political science program for a six-week intensive summer school for academically gifted high school students (the Governor's School of South Carolina). Objectives of the program were to minimize bureaucratic constraints and to encourage faculty and students to pursue their chosen disciplines. Despite the lack of bureaucratic constraints, faculty encountered problems developing courses. Problems included selecting the most appropriate subject matter and placing disciplinary criteria above personal or student-centered criteria. On the basis of this case study, it is suggested that political scientists are so accustomed to bureaucratic constraints that they may be at somewhat of a loss to proceed when these constraints are absent. (DB)

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Teaching Political Science Without Bureaucratic Constraints: The Governor's School Experience

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Aron G. Tannenbaum
Lander College

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Teaching Political Science Without Bureaucratic Constraints:
The Governor's School Experience

Developing new courses is one of the ordinary duties of college instructors. In this short paper I wish to discuss some aspects of the process by which new undergraduate political science courses are developed. I will use a case study approach in which the difficulties I personally experienced in developing one particular political science course are used to raise some questions, and explore tentatively some answers, about the course-developing process in general. It is a personal report on a particular case; there is no intention here to cover all possible cases. It is hoped that colleagues will respond to this report both scientifically and empathetically.

It is useful to recognize two categories of constraints upon college instructors' behavior: bureaucratic and disciplinary. Bureaucratic constraints are those which relate the intent to develop a new course to the institutional structure of the academic world. There are many bureaucratic constraints upon an instructor between the time a new course is proposed and when it is added to the curriculum and students enroll in it. Clearance (or at least benign neglect) usually needs to be obtained from institutional superiors--department chairpersons, deans, and the like. Adequate student enrollments need to be projected plausibly. Colleagues jealous of their own staked-out academic turf have to be appeased, bypassed, or bested if they feel threatened by the proposed new course. Personnel and research resources must be allocated. The proposed course's contribution to the undergraduate political science major should be demonstrated. Readers can doubtless add further gems from their own experience.

Disciplinary constraints mandate that the content of the proposed new course meets the generally accepted criteria for what constitutes a course in the discipline of political science. Boundary-maintenance considerations limit the acceptance of interdisciplinary courses into the political science curriculum. Current research frontiers may bestow disciplinary legitimacy upon one proposed new course while perhaps delegitimizing another existing course.

The relationship between bureaucratic and disciplinary constraints lies at the heart of the new course development process. On the basis of my own and others' experience two general statements may be suggested. First, bureaucratic constraints probably have less legitimacy in the eyes of most political scientists than disciplinary constraints. The

bureaucratic litany is both familiar and depressing because scarce academic resources--time and energy--need seemingly to be squandered in matters of marginal legitimacy. Second, it may also be the case that at many colleges, bureaucratic constraints are more confining than disciplinary ones. Instructors desiring to develop new courses may have greater difficulty with the former than the latter.

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that most political scientists would prefer greatly to face mainly (ideally, only) disciplinary constraints when developing new courses. If bureaucratic factors could somehow be eliminated or greatly reduced, instructors would be greatly relieved and stimulated by their freedom from the fetters of academic bureaucracy.

I, too, shared that preference for the demise of academic bureaucracy and the expectation of freedom therefrom. The Governor's School therefore seemed to be an ideal institution precisely because it maximized those values. To my surprise, however, I discovered that those values do not necessarily lead to expected results. It has led me to the following two tentative generalizations which are explored in the remainder of this paper: (1) We political scientists are more accustomed to bureaucratic constraints than we would like to believe; and (2) In the absence of bureaucratic constraints upon new course development, we may be at somewhat of a loss to proceed.

The Governor's School of South Carolina is a six-week intensive summer experience for "gifted and talented" high school students, mostly rising seniors, who reside in the state of South Carolina. The school is sponsored by the governor's office and selects students from both public and private secondary schools. Among other activities, each student takes a subject-area course conducted at a college level. Students receive neither grades nor credit for their work. A majority of the faculty is drawn from various colleges to spend the summer at the school, returning to their home campuses for the regular academic year.

The entire program is intended to be a free-standing institution in which neither students nor faculty should feel constrained by any factor external to the particular discipline in which they are involved. The intention is largely fulfilled, thus keeping bureaucratic constraints to a minimum. Student enrollments are arranged before each class begins. There is very little professional jealousy or other friction among the faculty since there are no other competing courses or colleagues in any discipline. No faculty member is in competition with another since there is no tenure, necessary resources for

effective classroom teaching are plentiful, and each person returns to his or her own campus at the end of the program. Instead of competition for scarce resources (e.g., tenure, budget, programs) in what is often a zero-sum political situation at many colleges, the faculty at the Governor's School function in a structure which encourages them to regard themselves as participants in a common undertaking in which one person's success helps rather than threatens the others. In sum, each instructor feels free to design and teach a course as he or she sees fit on primarily disciplinary, not bureaucratic, criteria.

I was invited to offer a political science course at the third annual Governor's School in the summer of 1978, the first political science course in the school's short history. Largely free from bureaucratic constraints, I set to work designing an appropriate course to be shaped primarily by disciplinary concerns. There were many college-level courses which at first sight seemed appropriate. Upon closer inspection, however, some difficulties became apparent.

Consider first the ordinary lower-level introductory course in the various subfields of political science. Courses such as "introduction to American politics" or their analogues in comparative, IR, and political philosophy all clearly fall within the boundaries of the discipline and, indeed, help define those boundaries to undergraduate students. Herein lies a problem: how can one of them be selected above the others for the Governor's School? By what criteria intrinsic to the discipline should that choice be made? There seemed to be an embarrassment of riches but a paucity of disciplinary decisional criteria.

A given instructor might select the course in which he or she has greatest expertise or interest. But that would be using personal rather than disciplinary criteria.

There is another and, in my view, more serious difficulty connected with "introduction to..." courses. In most colleges the rationale for those courses is primarily bureaucratic rather than disciplinary. They are a means to entice undecided students to select a political science major and thus boost upper-level course enrollments. They are also service courses with which all college students can fulfill their college's distribution requirements. Lower-level students typically take four or five of these introductory courses in various disciplines at the same time.

These bureaucratic considerations run against the form and spirit of the Governor's School. Since Governor's School students return to their high schools for their senior year there is no particular need to entice them into majoring in political science,

at least not for some other college's political science program. The idea of enticing students into a given major, even if the event is some years away, requires a missionizing zeal which runs against the spirit of common undertaking pervading the whole school's experience.

The rationale for college distribution requirements is that these courses help students become familiar with the ways in which academic knowledge is organized and the world is understood. It is not any one particular course but the collection of introductory courses which is supposed to produce this result.[2] But at the Governor's School, students take only one subject-area discipline, not a series. Students would therefore be exposed to a too-narrow learning experience were the "introduction to..." approach used.

Similar objections can be raised to other types of college political science courses. A "scope and methods" course is intended usually for political science majors who will make use of the course's analytic and research skills in other political science courses. But Governor's School students do not take other political science courses and will not take them for another two or three years. A regular upper-level political science course will probably find even "gifted and talented" high school students lacking in basic political knowledge.

All these political science courses are not without their disciplinary rationales. But merely falling within these boundaries is a necessary but not sufficient condition for use at the Governor's School. The other problem is that many of them, especially the "introduction to..." courses, take their form largely because they meet certain bureaucratic constraints imposed by the typical college academic structure. If those constraints were removed, there would be insufficient disciplinary criteria by which to select a course for the Governor's School.

This situation also raises questions about the sources of change within the discipline. To what extent is the discipline driven by autonomous impulses (e.g., current research frontiers, methodological advances, even changes in the external political world to which it must respond)?[3] To what extent by bureaucratic considerations of the institutions in which the discipline and the great majority of its practitioners find their home? If the institutions were to change might not the discipline change as well? This notion, I believe, is rather unsettling to those who would like to believe that the discipline is autonomous and that it generates internally its own sense of priorities, values, and identity.

Being unable to devise an appropriate course for the Governor's School led to an enlarged search process for disciplinary decisional criteria. The details of the search need not be chronicled here, except to note that it was a highly interesting exercise in its own right.[4] It was not until after the Governor's School course had already been designed and taught that the search led to some interesting suggestions by Eugene Miller which helped place the course into a meaningful perspective.[5] Miller advances a distinction between teaching political science from a scientific compared to a "prescientific" point of view. The former, with its behavioral panoply is one possible starting point for teaching the discipline. It has the disadvantage, says Miller, of imposing a scientific viewpoint upon individuals who may not themselves be scientific and for whom, therefore, such an approach may not be altogether meaningful. It tends to alienate citizens from an appreciation of the political <u>per se</u>.

Miller advances an alternative approach which starts with a consideration of the ordinary citizen's awareness of the political world. He suggests teaching the discipline by building upon the

> prescientific awareness of politics that men and women gain from membership in political society and from active involvement in it. This primary awareness of the political world is the ground in which the tree of political knowledge is rooted.[6]

According to Miller, the virtue of this approach is to enable citizens, including students, to establish stronger perceptions and affect between the concerns of politics in general and of their own lives.

How can the concept of citizens' "prescientific awareness of politics" be operationalized? In his article Miller is addressing the question of pre-collegiate education in politics. He decided to look to each state's legislation on political education in secondary schools as guides to what ought to be taught in pre-collegiate political science courses. However, this approach has the disadvantage of again allowing bureaucratic constraints to determine or too greatly influence the concerns of political science as a discipline. In any case it is not applicable to the Governor's School which is not bureaucratically connected with the state education department.

I chose another way to use Miller's "prescientific awareness" concept. It began by making some initial assumptions about how the Governor's School students were likely to perceive and evaluate their political environment (or, in other words, "where the students are coming from," politically speaking). Variables

taken into account included socio-economic background (e.g., corporate management, military officer corps, and Southern small towns), capacity and willingness to articulate political views (high but combative), overall paucity of countervailing liberalizing forces within their predominantly conservative and moralistic political culture, and ability to translate potentially threatening intellectual challenges into intellectually stimulating discussion and analysis.

Designed around those assumptions, the course aimed at helping students clarify, expand, analyze, and otherwise make more use of their starting conceptions of the realm of the political. The goal was to enhance the students' ability to do what Karl Deutsch referred to as "subjective theory," making relatively distant (political) objects or situations "relevant to one's own emotions, needs, or desires."[7]

The details of the actual course developed for the Governor's School can be summarized quickly. Oriented around the concept of authority relationships, it began with an exercise derived from Daniel Elazar's trichotomy of American political cultures[8] and was followed by a look at authority relationships in the Communist Manifesto, Sermon on the Mount, and Tenth Federalist. Glenn Tinder's Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions[9] served as a focusing text, having the virtue of introducing students to a systematic approach to political philosophy without the accompanying problem of compelling students to link particular ideas to specific philosophers (a task better left to a full-fledged college course). Tinder's open-ended style encouraged students to articulate and then systematize their own conceptions of human nature, power, and equality which he emphasizes.

A large number of science fiction short stories and novels was also used to provide case studies of authority relationships and especially to focus upon ways in which individuals respond to them. By the time the course closed with an examination of Ursula LeGuin's epic novel, The Dispossessed,[10] students were able more effectively to analyze and identify empathetically with individuals within the speculative capitalist and anarcho-communistic societies created in that work.

This political science course at the Governor's School is neither unique nor especially noteworthy per se. Its significance lies not in its content but in its rationale and in the search process which it caused to take place.

This paper is based upon only a single case and upon the experience of colleagues gathered in a non-systematic manner. If its analysis has any validity, however, it raises some

significant questions about how political science is taught to undergraduate students and how it ought to be taught. What specifically ought to be the relationship between bureaucratic and disciplinary constraints in developing new courses? How in general should the discipline be presented and made meaningful to undergraduate students? The unusual situation at the Governor's School has, I believe, provided another perspective upon some of our more traditional teaching concerns.

NOTES

1. "Bureaucratic" here refers to attributes of large complex organizations in general and not specifically to Weberian bureaucracy.

2. I hesitate to classify this situation as goal displacement because I have not examined the origins of the distribution requirements system in American colleges to ascertain its initial goals.

3. There may be some reluctance to include "changes in the external political world" in the category of autonomous influences within the discipline. I have in mind the impact of real-world changes upon individual political scientists in government service who later returned to the academic world and sought to incorporate their governmental experience into the discipline's perspectives. For the subfield of comparative politics see the essay by Harry Eckstein, "A Perspective on Comparative Politics, Past and Present" in Harry Eckstein & David E. Apter (eds.), Comparative Politics: A Reader (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 3-32. For public administration see James W. Fesler, "Public Administration and the Social Sciences, 1946 to 1960" in Frederick C. Mosher (ed.), American Public Administration: Past, Present, Future (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1975), pp. 97-141.

4. It was gratifying to observe that my search had many of the characteristics discussed in James G. March & Herbert Simon, Organizations (New York: Wiley, 1958), pp. 115-116 and 138-142 ff.

5. Eugene F. Miller, "What Political Scientists Can Learn from Teaching American Government," Teaching Political Science 4:1 (October 1976), pp. 3-30.

6. Miller, pp. 3-4.

7. Karl Deutsch, "On Political Theory and Political Action," APSR 55:1 (March 1971), p. 12. Also see Robert E. Lane, Political Man (New York: Free Press, 1972), especially chapter 7, "Ideological Self-Analysis as Political Education," pp. 121-139.

8. Daniel Elazar, American Federalism: A View From the States, 2nd ed. (New York: Crowell, 1972), pp. 90-126.

9. Glenn Tinder, Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).

10. Ursula LeGuin, The Dispossessed (New York: Avon Books, 1974). Other science fiction authors read included Orwell, Huxley, Asimov, Clarke, and Shaara. For discussions of political science fiction see Chester B. Rogers, "Science Fiction in the Political Science Classroom," Teaching Political Science 3:4 (July 1976), pp. 401-412 and Clifford E. Landers, "'Science Fiction in the Political Science Classroom': A Comment," Teaching Political Science 4:4 (July 1977), pp. 475-480.

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